

Consumer Reports Health
BEST BUY DRUGS
Free Guidance for Consumers on Prescription Medicines



Consumer Drug Alert: Avoid weight-loss drugs Alli and Xenical (Orlistat)

We've recently reviewed several thousand adverse event reports from the Food and Drug Administration that show side effects associated with the drug [Orlistat](#)—the active ingredient in the over-the-counter (OTC) weight-loss drug Alli and the prescription drug Xenical. The worrying findings have further strengthened our earlier advice: Skip both versions of this drug.

The reports, obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, show a pattern of adverse events, including rectal bleeding and kidney, liver and thyroid problems that are associated with Orlistat. (It has not been verified by the FDA.) However, the [FDA is already investigating liver toxicity issues](#) associated with both drugs, and with rectal bleeding with Xenical.

What is it and how does it work?

Orlistat is a powerful medication meant for people who are overweight or obese. Both Alli and Xenical are specifically approved to be taken only while also adhering to a low-calorie diet and exercise program. Even then, it produces only a 5 percent to 10 percent decrease in body weight.

Orlistat works by blocking enzymes in the gut that normally digest fat, thus preventing its absorption. But that lack of absorption can lead to a number of side effects, including oily underwear staining, gas with involuntary discharge of stool, fecal urgency, increased number of bowel movements, and fecal incontinence. Virtually everyone who takes orlistat experiences diarrhea. Orlistat also hinders the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins, notably beta-carotene (vitamin A), vitamin D, vitamin E, and vitamin K.

The bottom line: The risks of Orlistat vastly outweigh the benefits. The millions of Americans who legitimately need to lose weight are far better off avoiding orlistat and weight-loss gimmicks. They should focus instead on what has been shown to work, without the risks: [eating fewer calories](#), exercising more and sticking with both for the long term.

[Read on for the full Best Buy Drug review of Alli and Xenical.](#)

What's New?

Best Buy Drug Report: Antipsychotics to treat schizophrenia

Some three million Americans have schizophrenia. It is a chronic disease with an unknown cause. While treatable, it is often characterized by up and down periods that can put a severe strain on families. Despite that, many affected people live meaningful lives and function well with proper treatment.

Antipsychotic medications used to treat schizophrenia, while helpful, can also have bothersome and substantial side effects, which can affect how likely someone is to continue taking their medications. Some studies now find that the "older" (pre-1950s) antipsychotics work just as well as the newer ones, while other newer drugs have become available as generics.

In the latest [Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs Report on Antipsychotics](#), we focused on the use of antipsychotics in adults. We looked at effectiveness, safety, side effects, dosing convenience, and cost into account, we have chosen the following as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* to treat people with

schizophrenia:

- *Generic perphenazine* – For people with schizophrenia who aren't satisfied with their current treatment and whose doctor thinks perphenazine is worth a try. People taking perphenazine should be monitored closely for muscle tremors and spasms.
- *Generic risperidone* – For people with schizophrenia who have taken perphenazine first and find it doesn't work well, or that it has intolerable side effects.
- *Olanzapine (Zyprexa)* – For patients with schizophrenia who have taken perphenazine first and find it doesn't work well, or have intolerable side effects. Olanzapine is not a good option for people who are overweight or have blood sugar abnormalities, diabetes, or heart disease.
- *Generic clozapine* – For people with moderate to severe schizophrenia who have little to no reduction in symptoms despite trying two or more antipsychotics.

The choice of generic perphenazine—if a person responds well to it—could save you hundreds of dollars a month (adding up to thousands of dollars each year) compared to Zyprexa and Risperdal, the brand-name version of risperidone, depending on the dose required.

We are unable to make a *Best Buy* selection between antipsychotics for people with bipolar disorder. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to do so at this time.

For additional information on more than [200 prescription drugs](#), alternatives to high-priced drugs and Best Buy selections for the most common, chronic medical conditions, visit ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

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